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Mealasta, Tigh nan Cailleachan Dubha

Survey and sampling

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The project aimed to sample the archaeological deposits within the scheduled area at Mealasta, Isle of Lewis. The sampling aims to recover dating material and assess the nature of occupation as evidenced by the deposits recorded. Recent research on the Lewis Chessmen (Caldwell et al 2009 and 2010) suggested that the pieces belonged to an important person living on Lewis, for instance a prince of the Kingdom of the Isles, a bishop or a clan chief. The souterrain recorded (NA92SE 2) from Mealasta is described in some sources as the find-spot for the Lewis Chessmen. The project cleaned the eroding section of machair at Mol Tiacanais, recording an enhanced soil horizon below the turf, several shallow pit or ditch features and the potential eroding corner of a drystone walled building. Samples were recovered from each of these features and the eroding edge backfilled; the samples will be analysed at the University of Durham by Dr Church. A series of boreholes were dug with a bucket augur behind the eroding edge to test the potential for further deeper soil or midden horizons within the scheduled area – these indicated that below the visibly eroding horizon machair sand extended to the base, some 3m deep in places.

Funder: Hunter Trust



Figure 1: Surveying in progress at Mealasta, Tigh nan Cailleachan Dubha